

Title: Interview with John Andersen.

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DIHLE: Okay, so this is Thursday, May 4th, 2006. I am Tracy Dihle interviewing John Andersen at Georgia Pacific and do I have your permission to record today?

ANDERSEN: You do.

DIHLE: Okay, great. I think I'll move that a little closer. Okay, so, let's start with the... [it] kind of makes sense to me [to] kind of do this chronologically.

ANDERSEN: Okay.

DIHLE: So, [would you] like to start with where and when were you born?

ANDERSEN: I was born in Chehalis, Washington on November 28th of 1953.

DIHLE: And what was your childhood like?

ANDERSEN: Just in a general sense, I grew up in a middle class, working family. I had one brother, one sister. Most all of the immediate family was in the Northwest – western side of Washington – and I grew up in a small town of Centralia [so] nothing out of the ordinary, nothing special.

DIHLE: Did you participate in any after-school activities, or did you have any particular activities that you enjoyed?

ANDERSEN: Yeah. I, like most boys, played organized sports going through school and was involved in... associated student body activities, leadership-related activities, student government.

DIHLE: Oh, great, so you got started being a leader early on.

ANDERSEN: Yes I did.

DIHLE: Do you think your parents had any influence on that, or was it just something that interested you or...?

ANDERSEN: Well, they were certainly supportive, and they certainly encouraged me. They didn't necessarily direct point, but they certainly supported my decisions, whatever it was I chose to do.

DIHLE: That's great. So what do you see as the most important things affecting who you were as a child?

ANDERSEN: The most important things? Well, I think I grew up in a comfortable environment, with lots of support from family and friends and [I] had the opportunity [to have] grandparents and parents that offered... afforded me lots of opportunities in terms of outdoor activities and other organized activities. And so I just had lots of opportunities.

DIHLE: That is great. Sounds like you had a great family environment. What educational and work experiences did you have before GP?

ANDERSEN: Well, primarily odd jobs going through school... through college. Primarily as I was... [during] the latter part of my high school and while I was going to junior college in Centralia I worked at a local grocery store and held various positions to help support my education. [I] transferred to the University of Washington in Seattle and completed my education there, and then from there [I] came to Georgia Pacific.

DIHLE: Oh, great! So you were... majored in chemical engineering, it looks like?

ANDERSEN: I have undergraduate degrees in chemistry and chemical engineering from the University of Washington.

DIHLE: Wow, great. And what brought you to GP?

ANDERSEN: I had interviewed with many different companies as I was getting out of school, and had an opportunity to travel and interview [with] companies in California and Ohio, and various other places and when the opportunity came to come to Bellingham... What attracted me was first the location and just the community itself and then, secondly, this particular facility was very unique. It was very diversified from an engineering point of view. And so I saw it as a combination of just a great work opportunity in terms of being a young engineer and then secondly just a nice place to raise a family.

DIHLE: Great, and so, when you started here, was it already Georgia Pacific, or was it one... they had already...?

ANDERSEN: It was. Yeah, I started here in June of 1977 and Georgia Pacific acquired the facility in 1965.

DIHLE: Oh, okay. What was the waterfront like at that time?

ANDERSEN: Well, [from] what I recall it was very busy. There was a very busy waterfront, primarily due to Georgia Pacific-related activities. It was a very large facility, employed, if I remember, approximately twelve hundred people at the time. There was also, I remember... Columbia Valley was a building products distribution center that was adjacent to our facility and – I don't specifically remember across the waterway the businesses – but there were more industrial related activities across the waterway, too. So

just from an industrial point of view it was a very busy waterfront. Nothing else really stands out in my mind about the specific businesses or activities. At the time, I believe there [were] more marine related activities through the Port of Bellingham's WIST Terminal than there is currently – ship traffic and so on and so forth. So it was... a viable industrial waterfront when I was, you know, and had been for many years.

DIHLE: How did the community interact with GP at that time? What was the... do you know what the... general feeling was?

ANDERSEN: My sense is that it was... had a long history here prior to Georgia Pacific's purchase of the facility and that it would... the community and the pulp mill had kind of grown together over many years. And for local residents it was a generally accepted part of the community and, in point of fact, most everybody had knowledge of, or relative of, or somehow had connection to the facility in one way or the other. And I think it was viewed as one of the primary economic drivers for the community and the county itself. Fortunately this county had other industrial activities in addition to Georgia Pacific, so there... it was a large employer and viewed as a large employer and generally accepted... would be the way I would characterize it.

DIHLE: Great. Where did you start in the plant?

ANDERSEN: I started as a Process Engineer, what we call a Process Engineer. My first projects were in what we called our alcohol plant...

DIHLE: I did a little bit of reading on that.

ANDERSEN: ...where we made ethanol from waste liquor from the pulping process. From there I also had projects in the pulp mill and other areas over the years. I was a Process Engineer here for approximately seven years.

DIHLE: So what would a typical day be like when you were a Process Engineer?

ANDERSEN: At that time, in 1977, the facility had just completed a fairly significant expansion, both in terms of ability to make more product, but also from a... technology point of view. And so, when I first came here... we were in the process of starting up new pieces of equipment. So a typical day for me would be to help that process, to get some things started, to get it to run as efficiently as it's supposed to, to understand how it's performing and identify ways to optimize performance, and troubleshoot issues that might arise where we might make something that... doesn't meet the product requirements such as it's supposed to, either from a quality point of view or from a quantity point of view. So typically a Process Engineer would have five or six different projects they were focused on, that they would devote attention to whereas other people couldn't allocate, you know, the proper time to do that.

DIHLE: That sounds like a very exciting job. How many people with that title were there approximately at that time, do you think?

ANDERSEN: Well, roughly, if I remember correctly, eight to ten of us, round figures. And then we had technicians that would work with us, too. And we had a lab with chemists and research chemists... to support that activity. So, a larger group, but specifically probably eight to ten process engineers.

DIHLE: It seems, from just the little history reading I've done, that that was a pretty exciting time to be here, I would think, just a time of growth.

ANDERSEN: It was a period of expansion and growth, and so, from a business point of view you're still in sort of the growing, expanding mode as opposed to the stabilizing... as opposed to the declining.

DIHLE: Oh, yeah.

ANDERSEN: And so, at that point in time it was still in the growth stages for the facility. There was lots of activity and, for engineers and production-related people that worked here, it was a fun time.

DIHLE: So then you went on to Production Supervisor, it says, alcohol plant, chlorine plant.

ANDERSEN: Yeah, in the, roughly, mid-1980's... 1984... thereabouts, sort of a logical production, or progression, for a Process Engineer was to move into production-related supervision where you actually had responsibility for operating sections of the facility. My first was in the alcohol plant. I was production supervisor in the alcohol plant for a period of time. And so you supervise operating and maintenance personnel that are on shift around the clock and you monitor... your production, your quality, your safety, personnel safety, and cost. And so it's a very broad-based type of job. You're essentially, in some ways, running a small business.

DIHLE: Right.

ANDERSEN: And so I did that. I also supervised a pulp production process for a period of time and then later actually spent time supervising the chlorine plant.

DIHLE: Wow, so that's quite a progression, I'd say. Let's see, and so then we have Environmental Manager, what does that entail?

ANDERSEN: Yes, there's... for most any business there's environmental regulatory requirements that need to be met, and especially so for a facility such as this that was fairly complex at the time. So there were... almost every environmental requirement, whether it related to air emissions or water discharges or waste management or hazardous waste, had some application here. And so I was asked to be the Environmental Manager and accepted that position approximately in, I believe, roughly 1991, I believe, and did that for about eight or nine years. And so essentially I had accountability for trying to

maintain environmental compliance with regulatory requirements. And oftentimes, that involved routine monitoring and reporting. It typically involves, you know, understanding and maintaining some current knowledge of regulatory requirements that evolve all the time.

DIHLE: Right.

ANDERSEN: [They] change all the time and, in point of fact, also involved, as the regulatory requirements became current or evolved in terms of cleanup of historical activities, so we would get involved in terms of past, you know, managing contamination from past historical activities. So as the regulatory requirements for cleanup became established in the early 1990's in this state, I got involved in that activity as well.

DIHLE: Yeah, I was going to say, it seems like that was a very busy time for environment... increasing environmental awareness. Like before that maybe there wasn't even an awareness of what the whole... ramifications would be. But it seems like to me from the readings I did that that must have been a real busy time. Because as the awareness increased, like you're saying, the regulations increased, and you have a lot more to deal with.

ANDERSEN: Correct.

DIHLE: But, it seems like your company really stayed current with that, in the readings that I've done, that it stayed current with the new awareness of, "Okay, well, oh wow, this Stuff we've been [doing] has been having this effect on the water, now we need to..." Yeah, so it seems like that, must have been a pretty busy, exciting time.

ANDERSEN: It was for me, and I think you're right, in terms of environmental awareness and associated regulatory requirements, [that] literally started in about the 1970's.

DIHLE: Mm hmm.

ANDERSEN: And that is not that far ago, but [they] have evolved quickly and changed, continuously since then. And clearly, in the early nineties from my perspective, the awareness level did increase... from both a community perspective and from a regulatory perspective. And I also concur that in my view, Georgia Pacific as a company, and this facility in particular, I felt we did exactly what was appropriate and proper and kept current and in some ways were out in front.

DIHLE: Do you think your having a history with the Pacific Northwest and being an outdoors person had any effect on how you viewed that process?

ANDERSEN: Well, I tend to look at it from an engineering perspective as much as anything. And by that, I mean I tend to look at it from what's appropriate and necessary and what's practical, and try to find the right balance. And by that I mean you can, in the

environmental field, get all kinds of perceptions and concerns about hazard[s]... health hazard[s], environmental hazard[s], and it's much more of a challenge in my mind to really get that to where it's real and then what do you do about it that's appropriate. And so I focused a lot of attention on trying to find the right balance in terms of... as environmental regulations evolved, and the public and others would input into that process. That was my input, [it] was, "Let's find the right balance here..."

DIHLE: Right...

ANDERSEN: "...and do what's appropriate." I guess, to answer your question, I don't know if it's where I was raised or my upbringing, but in my dealings in the environmental field I didn't find anybody that didn't want to do the right thing. The question was what's right to do...

DIHLE: Right....

ANDERSEN: ...and how to go about it. And so, for me it's always a function of decisions based on factual information, and so that's where I spent most of my time.

DIHLE: And the facts seem to be evolving as... studies come up

ANDERSEN: They still are.

DIHLE: Yes, and that's the thing, new studies come up, new... and you know, where did the study come from and what can we verify and how can we include that? That sounds very interesting to me. Okay, and then let's see. Tissue Mill Technical Services Manager. Was that where your... Oh, wait! Manager, Alcohol and Lignon Operations.

ANDERSEN: Yes. I don't remember the exact time frame. I think it was in roughly 1999. I had the opportunity to manage our chemical business operations and so it's a little different from being just a supervisor. It involved both our alcohol plants and our lignin plants, and so I had salaried staff plus hourly folks that reported up through that group to me, and so now it's more truly running a business in a bigger sense. And so [I] had the opportunity to do that for a couple years prior to the pulp mill shutdown.

DIHLE: Oh, wow. So you had a lot of people under you basically, a lot of responsibilities, it sounds like?

ANDERSEN: At that time there were three primary operating units here: the pulp business, the chemical business, and the tissue business; and I was helping to man the chemical business.

DIHLE: Okay, and so then you moved to the tissue mill after that?

ANDERSEN: Following the pulp mill closure I moved to the tissue mill and initially spent time as sort of what we call a Technical Services Manager, and so I was helping to

provide support to the operating folks in the tissue mill in the context of engineering services or information technology services or process control, those sorts of things. And so [I] did that for a couple of years and then, most recently, I've been a paper mill manager there, responsible for our paper machines.

DIHLE: And as you... I'm looking over this progression and wondering... I mean, I'm thinking technology has changed a lot since you first started in this business. [Did] you take any continuing education classes or do you just kind of do stuff as you go along, and learn about things as you...?

ANDERSEN: Yeah, I haven't specifically taken what you might think of as continuing education classes, but there are various opportunities within our corporation and elsewhere, to get together periodically and sort of share knowledge. And so there's ways to generally keep current.

DIHLE: Right, right.

ANDERSEN: Not... but to go out and specifically take a class, no, I'm not among that.

DIHLE: Yeah. I just wondered how that kind of... if you did it in a seminar format with people that you work with or how...

ANDERSEN: Sometimes, yes.

DIHLE: Interesting. So, let's see. Well, has GP invented new products or changed production in your time here? Obviously, the latter part is yes, but have they invented new products since you've been here?

ANDERSEN: Well, I would say primarily in our pulping and chemical business there was a lot of innovation and product development. The fun for me at this facility had been the fact that it was very unique and sort of a one of a kind, particularly on the chemical business side. And so the nature of taking a waste product from a pulp mill and converting it into chemicals, ethanol- and lignin-related products, was evolving all the time. And so there were many people here that that was their job... to find and create new products. I wasn't specifically involved in the development of those, but I was involved in the production of those. At the same time there were folks here, engineers, that created new technology... in the pulping process, or in the bleaching process, that actually found application throughout the industry over the years... So there was actually what I would call a very knowledgeable and capable group of people that in fact helped shape the overall industry, frankly.

DIHLE: Yeah, that's amazing! When I was reading a little bit about taking the waste products and making something viable out of them, that's very exciting from a business standpoint and also from an environmental standpoint, I thought. That's why when I saw you did the Environmental Manager... how great is that? You guys take something that

would have previously been, you know, just waste, and we don't know what, and making something useful out of it, that's very exciting to me.

ANDERSEN: It was fun.

DIHLE: Yeah, that's great! So this is kind of a broad question. I don't know... how you want to go with this, but how has the company changed over your time here?

ANDERSEN: Well, I can speak to that I think in a real general sense. When I first started work here, most of the facilities... the larger facilities in Georgia Pacific operated fairly, I guess you would say, almost autonomously self-contained, self-sufficient, and made decisions more locally. As time progressed I think the corporation became a little more – I have to think of the right way to describe this – more centralized as opposed to autonomous operations. ... In some ways it was driven by the desire to promote safety and environmental compliance and those sorts of things. There was much more of a need to... for everybody to do things the same way and have more accountability to make sure that things are done... So if you're making a tissue product at one facility it looks the same and behaves the same as... the same tissue product at another tissue facility because you can get them side by side on the shelf and you don't want them to look and behave differently.

DIHLE: Mm hmm.

ANDERSEN: And so, as the business evolved and as Georgia Pacific evolved, it became more centralized as opposed to autonomous facilities. And I will also say that Georgia Pacific became, in my view, a leader in the industry in workplace safety, where they made a conscious decision to make it a priority and lead the industry in some ways. And then I would also say that I observed, during my time as Environmental Manager, that their focus and attention to environmental compliance increased significantly where they provided many more resources and assistance than previously [and] where essentially a facility was on its own with respect to the people it had on site.

DIHLE: Oh.

ANDERSEN: So, then, in the later years, many more knowledgeable resources became available through sort of a more corporate, centralized...

DIHLE: Oh, yeah, that makes sense to me having worked for large, national corporate companies. As far as you're saying, Georgia Pacific being a leader in the industry, as far as safety, what does that mean to you? I mean, could you explain what you mean by that to me?

ANDERSEN: Yes, I think Georgia Pacific decided that it would be the safest company in the forest products industry. That was a decision they made. And so safety became, not just in word but in action, the priority. And so, when it starts from the top and it is a consistent theme, and it's important, and it gets tracked and measured and all of that,

that's in fact what happened. And I think that was a good thing not only for Georgia Pacific but I think [the] industry as a whole... sort of decided that it's not okay for people to get hurt at work. And so [they] focused more attention on it.

DIHLE: And do you think that affected legislation in any way?

ANDERSEN: I guess my personal perception is that the work place caught up and then potentially got ahead of some of the legislation. My experiences, whether it's environmental or safety, most regulatory requirements occur as a result of a need. And if people aren't getting hurt there's less of a need for creating requirements.

DIHLE: Mm hmm.

ANDERSEN: And so, in my view, if we didn't have a lot of work place injuries or if we didn't have environmental issues from past practices, there wouldn't have been a need for regulatory requirements.

DIHLE: Right, right.

ANDERSEN: And so, I guess to answer your question I think Georgia Pacific and the industry in general has caught up and now, I think, in some ways, gotten out in front of regulatory requirements.

DIHLE: Great. Let's see, what do you think were the most important events since you've been at the plant?

ANDERSEN: Well, in a general sense, what I've seen in my career here has been a period of decline in terms of the various operating units here. In other words, I've seen the closure of various sections of the facility and it's much smaller now than it has been. That's a natural process that occurs for any business. Probably the most significant event in my career here was the closure of the pulp mill that resulted primarily from the energy crisis in, I believe it was 1991 or [around] there... or, I'm sorry, 2001 or thereabouts. That's probably the most significant event for this workplace.

DIHLE: Mm hmm. So, I guess, can you describe to someone of my level, which is [a] low level of understanding, how the energy crisis brought that about, or how that kind of progressed?

ANDERSEN: Yes, I think I can. I can't give you the history associated with the energy and Enron, and...

DIHLE: No, I don't want that!

ANDERSEN: ...all of that, but the reality was that this facility, like lots of industrial facilities, uses lots of energy, electricity being one of those forms of energy. And we

purchased, for many years, energy on the market as opposed to under contract, fixed contract.

DIHLE: Oh.

ANDERSEN: And most... a lot of large consumers are on the market and that energy market fluctuates.

DIHLE: Right.

ANDERSEN: And with the energy crisis – whether it was real or not – that occurred drove electrical prices to a point where it became uneconomical to operate the facility. And so we weren't profitable and literally stopped our operation and stopped taking electricity for a period of time and then the company had to make a decision about whether it wanted to continue to operate this facility or not. And they chose not to in terms of the pulping process and the associated chemical operations. They chose to continue to operate the tissue mill, but decided to go ahead and permanently close the pulp mill.

DIHLE: And did that affect a lot of... a large number of jobs?

ANDERSEN: It did. I can't remember the exact number, Tracy. You know, I'm sure you could find that out.

DIHLE: Yeah, it's probably in the paper.

ANDERSEN: Four hundred, four hundred fifty jobs, yeah.

DIHLE: Woah, that's significant. So, I was wondering if that kind of goes into the next part about were there any difficult moments working at the plant?

ANDERSEN: Well, you know, I guess my first answer is no, there's never been a difficult moment working at this plant because it's just a matter of what somebody thinks difficult is, right?

DIHLE: Right, yeah.

ANDERSEN: But if you're asking me have there been challenges, absolutely. It's a challenge to run any business, and there are... for an operation that runs twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, lots of little interruptions.

DIHLE: Right.

ANDERSEN: And so there are all those little short term bumps in the road, and there are many of those. But in the big picture? No.

DIHLE: They're bumps, not mountains or hills, or...

ANDERSEN: They're bumps, but in the big picture they're not big issues. So I really have anything that for me fits that. I mean, I'm sure that the pulp mill closure and the associated loss of jobs was a challenge for us. I mean, that's painful.

DIHLE: Oh, yeah. People you've worked with for quite some time. And do you think that affected how the community reacted to the plant or people that worked here?

ANDERSEN: Well, I mean, I'm not sure that I can tell you accurately that the community's perception about things... my thought has always been that most folks observe but aren't really active about their concerns. It doesn't affect them directly and otherwise they're okay with it. There were certain folks that were uncomfortable with heavy industry... surrounded by a community, and I think generally that happens no matter what that industry is. And so my guess is that for folks that have been in Bellingham for many years, they probably were, in my guess, sad to see the closure. For a lot of people that came here in the last, you know, maybe short term that maybe hadn't been in a community with heavy industry around them or a pulp mill or, you know, didn't come here for that reason, to work here and so on and so forth, they thought, probably think it's a good thing. And my guess is in... the big picture, many years from now, it will be a good thing because I'm sure the waterfront will look entirely different.

DIHLE: Hm, yeah... that's, we'll get to that in a moment, I guess. Let's see, so what is the most memorable thing about working at the plant?

ANDERSEN: Well, for me it was the... quality and capability of the people that work here. And I can, I mean, I feel that way, sort of, from top to bottom, because I've had an opportunity to visit lots of facilities and just the general knowledge of every worker here is above average compared to other areas of the country, in my view.

DIHLE: Wow.

ANDERSEN: And then I would say, particularly the group of people that essentially ran the business here and the technical knowledge and capability was outstanding, in my view. And that's... one of the primary reasons I came to work here [because] it's fun to work with bright, knowledgeable, energetic people, and I got to do that.

DIHLE: Well, it's great that you still have that idea, you know, that you still have that feeling all these years later. I think that's a testament to the people that have chosen to work here. That's great, yeah. So going back to what you think... I guess we've talked a little bit about how the waterfront has changed since you've been here. But, I guess two of the questions that are kind of being asked of people in your position is how do you think future generations should remember the work you did at the plant, the company in general, and the waterfront itself? And then, what do you think will happen to the waterfront in Bellingham in the near future and during the long run?

ANDERSEN: I mean, I guess for some people, they will look back at this facility as having provided for their families and their extended families, and their community, whether directly or indirectly, and so there's certainly people that will think about it that way. I suspect that when people look back years from now, it was an industry that was associated directly to the timber industry in this part of the country, which was sort of the foundation for economic development for this part of the country for many, many years and they'll see it as an extension of that. Beyond that, I doubt they care.

ANDERSEN: That's kind of how I view it, I guess, [that it] is connected with the timber and extension of...

ANDERSEN: It's just part of... the development of this part of the country over the years, and it's just an extension of that.

DIHLE: And so where do you see the waterfront going? What do you see happening with the waterfront in the [future]?

ANDERSEN: Well, I think it will, over time... My guess is it will take some time but it will likely become much like you see in other areas of the Northwest and the Puget Sound, whether it be in the Seattle area or the Everett area, where it becomes much more integrated with the... retail and residential aspects of this community as opposed to the industrial aspects of the community – everything I see and know about it points in that direction – and there may well likely be a connection to Western Washington University. Beyond that I see it more as retail, residential, catering... And I think more connected... to the maritime opportunities that it's connected to, right?

DIHLE: Right.

ANDERSEN: In one form or another.

DIHLE: Well, it will be interesting to see.

ANDERSEN: Yes, it will. And so as Bellingham continues to evolve the waterfront will evolve right with it.

DIHLE: Do you feel like there's something that we haven't covered that you'd like to add?

ANDERSEN: No, I'm not sure what it is. I mean, I believe that this has been a wonderful place to have a career and raise a family, and so I have absolutely no regrets at all about it. I've been treated very well in my time here and I think I made a great choice twenty-nine years ago.

DIHLE: Great! Well, thank you so much. Thank you very much.

ANDERSEN: You're welcome.